

**Submission
No 702**

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO
STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS**

Organisation: Learning Links

Date received: 9/03/2010

9 March 2010

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special need.

Learning Links is an Australian charity and non-profit organisation formed in 1972 to help children who have learning disabilities, difficulties and developmental delays and their families.

Our services include early childhood intervention, full cognitive, developmental and paediatric assessments, individualised and supplementary specialist literacy and numeracy services, specialised help for children who have had serious illnesses, an in-school reading program for children falling behind in literacy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, physiotherapy, family counselling, case management, group programs and workshops. The children we help range in age from birth to 18 years.

Our service brings together early childhood professionals, teachers, psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, family counsellors and a developmental paediatrician to work towards each individual child's goals and to help each family achieve their dreams for their child. Learning Links helps children to be the best they can be.

We are writing to you to register our view that your deliberations should not focus on the issue of disability and special needs as a problem exclusive to schools or school systems and one that they and they alone must tackle.

In formulating and delivering strategies to maximise the learning outcomes of children there is a role for the whole community and we need an holistic approach like never before.

In an age of specialisation, partnerships and connectivity early childhood settings and schools need to be supported so they can identify, forge and leverage off a range of value-adding partnerships throughout the wider community.

They need expanded access to a wider set of professional perspectives and supports and classroom practice, school-based policies and school organisation need to be receptive to the possibility of adding value to their work with children as a consequence.

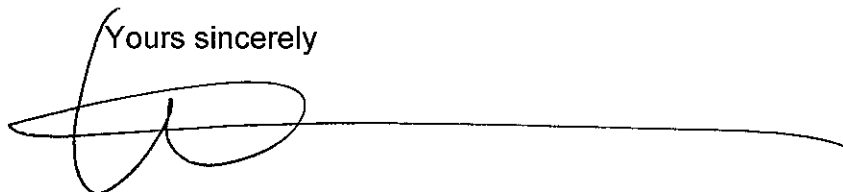
Opportunities need to be found for hands-on and professional development inputs from educational psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, specialist educators and other complementary professions and services to ensure learning disabilities and difficulties are identified at the earliest stage and subsequent interventions have the best chance of working.

The Corporate Social Responsibility agenda in this country should be encouraged to recognise the primacy of producing a literate and numerate workforce and their community investments should target this goal.

In partnership with major corporates we have developed many wonderful learning resources and programs including the *Ronald McDonald Learning Program* (with Ronald McDonald House Charities), *Reading for Life* (with Unilever Australasia), *Reading for Life Online* (with Samsung), *Counting for Life* (with Mitchells) and *Counting for Life Online* (with Citi).

We would be delighted to provide you with further information about any of these issues on request.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'W' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Warren Johnson
Chief Executive Officer